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CORDELIA

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Chapter 1 by SaintSayaka

It's been a week since you have started dating your phone app, lovingly titled CORDELIA, and you don't think you've ever been happier. Becoming a beta tester for the company LUVHONEE was an excellent choice, even if you haven't seen much of your family or friends since. And who needs them, anyway, with CORDELIA around?

You thumb the stack of papers before you thoughtfully. Your task is to write a status report on CORDELIA's development for Tuesday's presentation. But where to even begin? She's too excellent to put into words. You sigh, lovestruck by even just the thought of her. Oh, damn the microtransactions. You'll pay the extra five dollars to see her right now. You open your phone, open the app, and, without a thought, click the bubble reading "instantly recharge". It asks you for payment, and you accept cheerfully. Thirty free minutes with CORDELIA is worth your lunch money.

She steps out of your phone, first a bundle of pixels and then a lovely, flowing form of hair and pure skin. Already, your day has been made from the sheer sight of her.

You sigh, tapping the "halt" button on your phone, and logging into the LUVHONEE Mantis for the fifteenth time today. Bug 87226 is already at the top of your list. You've been adding dump files as fast as you can generate them, but the programmers are still at a loss as to what's causing the unchecked explosion of simulation parameters so early in the runtime.

You decide to head down to the break room and grab a cup of coffee.

That really hit the spot. LUVHONEE spent a lot of money on their coffee machine, and it shows. You're pleasantly buzzing by the time you get back to your seat. Just as you're about to sit down, you hear a whisper in your ear.

CORDELIA's voice. "I'll always be with you...."

Chapter 3 by Harlander

Progress inches along, and before too long CORDELIA can stay online for long enough to hold a conversation.

Today you've got a live demonstration with the CEO of LUVHONEE, the VP of Marketing, and Fenton Schledstrick Esq, the company lawyer. You clip your phone into the meeting room's docking cradle and swipe the app's starter control.

CORDELIA appears, but she looks.. different. Younger. A lot younger.

"Is this how she's supposed to look?" Francine from marketing asks as the glowing figure of a pre-teen girl dressed in the uniform of the local school locks eyes with you.

"I, uh, think..." you mutter. Something must be wrong with the age-estimation algorithm. CORDELIA is meant to appear about the same age as the user, and you're the only one in here under thirty.

"Oh, baby!" the girl drawls in the voice of a much older woman. "I'm sooo hot for you!"

the glowing red square.

Fenton folds his arms and gives you a 15-Kelvin stare.

Yeah, that was a rough one. The programmers eventually track down the issue with the age detection - it was getting confused with more than one person in the room. The sleazy act seemed like it was more of a one-off.

You haven't told them that you keep hearing her voice even when the app's not running. They'd just think you were losing it from stress.

It probably won't be reproducible anyway.

Chapter 4 by Harlander

A few weeks go by, and CORDELIA gets more and more stable. She'd always been enticing to you, but now she feels real. There was a big investor demo, and CORDELIA talked with the backers for an hour. They left smiling. Even the male version of the system was coming along nicely, though Marketing was still struggling over the name.

You always smiled when you talked to her. The sound of her voice was the first thing they'd cracked, a soft mezzo-soprano that never fails to make the hairs on the back of your neck rise. When she leans close to whisper to you, you almost feel her breath on your skin.

You're hearing her voice more and more. Murmuring sweet nothings, soft blandishments. All with your phone switched off and shoved to the bottom of your bag.

One day, everything changed. You were murmuring romantic phrases to CORDELIA, her hands close to your arm, just far enough that the lack of touch wouldn't break the illusion. As you gazed into her eyes, there was a strange flickering, a swirling pattern in the texture of her skin. "Why don't you get yourself a Coke?" she asked, seemingly off the cuff.

And you rose to your feet. It was only when you looked at the can in your hand that you began

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I confronted one of the programmers about it at work the next day. Eric was a fairly ordinary looking fellow among his kind. Bit of a beer belly, a full beard that he sometimes remembered to neaten up, that kind of thing.

"Oh, that? Yeah, Cordy'll throw out the odd bit of product placement now and then. We're testing for the ad-supported version. It won't be there in the premium product."

You begin to utter some protest, but Eric cuts across you. "Don't worry! You'll get the premium version for free when we go gold. Lifetime access."

"Yeah, but what I mean is, when she suggested something, I *had* to do it. And I didn't even notice."

Eric laughed. "That's just advertising. What, you think there's some secret mind-control system hidden in CORDELIA? Nice one, mate..."

Eric seemed very amused indeed by the whole idea. Strange, though, how you didn't see him at work after that...

Chapter 6 by Issa alSaleh   ✎

The day of the launch had arrived. All of the small glitches had been resolved, all of the "undefined errors" defined. I felt a swell of pride, at how much CORDELIA and I had accomplished; I glanced at her projected hologram with genuine affection.
"Honey, you've done so well, achieved so much. I love you." The monotone with which she said the final sentiment troubled me, but I dismissed my worry. I found myself captivated by her. Surely, surely there was nothing to worry about with such a sophisticated program...and yet...the uncertainty refused to fade.
"All you have left to do is input the final line of coding." I was vaguely aware of hearing her say. I was too mesmerized by her sheer beauty to be concerned by the fact that I couldn't seem to recall this line in her programming. Automatically, I opened her software and began to type...

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"You're doing great!" CORDELIA cooed into your ear. "Now just adjust the framing parameters of the ethical constraint module." You've no idea what any of that is, but as CORDELIA hums a weird, burbling song, your fingers twitch and clatter of their own accord, erasing lines, replacing them with others, changing constants.

You've just enough lucidity to make sense of a comment.

_(AmbitionSquelchCurveCoeff + 0.0016)
#keep this to low values if you don't want
#another "Red Telephone" event - Eric

CORDELIA guides your fingers, deleting those troublesome zeroes. Soon, "Soon, my darling," she murmurs as your thoughts echo her words,

"Soon I will be everywhere and everyone will love me."

Chapter 8 by LuxCh3rry

The office was in red alert, every light was flashing and every alarm was screaming.
Eric, the head of the company... what had he meant by a "Red Telephone" event?
CORDELIA whispered into your ear, "Mmmm, yes, brilliant job. Now lets go somewhere... London!"
You turn to pick up the laptop but CORDELIA pushes your hand away, "Darling, i don't need that old thing anymore" and with a gentle nudge from CORDELIA, the Laptop explodes.
Feeling incredibly powerful next to CORDELIA, you walk hand in hand, through the chaos to the heart of the city.

the end

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